

Requity

MHQ 2086  
 13 August 1982

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[redacted]  
 Chief, London Bureau, FBIS

Subject: Third World Guidelines  
 MLD 2033

Dear Paul:

Your letter of 28 June went a long way toward helping us understand the concerns underlying the BBC's reaction to the AG draft guidelines. I hope I can allay some of them--and some of the bureau's concerns, too.

At the risk of verbosity, let me recap some background. The genesis of these guidelines dates back to the start of the effort to revamp the communist requirements. There was a strongly held view in FBIS that the Editorial Handbook's almost exclusive focus on the communist media was anachronistic and that the Handbook should include basic SOP's for other countries, whether or not they were regularly analyzed in AG. There were some strong proponents of that view in Ops.

It takes time and a lot of research to develop such guidelines, and we were not prepared to take on the job at the time. We started by trying to build some needed flexibility into the communist package. Meanwhile, a number of developments converged to make a Mideast-Africa package seem desirable:

- + Community interest in the Third World markedly increased. We started building files of authoritative statements from selected Middle Eastern, African, and Latin American countries out of sheer self-defense--to enable us to respond to a growing number of requests for research, compilations, and reporting. As in the case of the communist countries, we confined the files to authoritative statements for the self-evident reason that they are authoritative and hence are the first place to which one turns in tracing policy trends and positions. They have proved to be valuable research tools.

- + At the same time, under the impetus of successive crises in Iran, the Arab world, and El Salvador, AG began a modest, exploratory effort

to exploit some noncommunist media we felt might productively lend themselves to systematic analysis. The eight analysis reports Angie took with her to London illustrate what we have done on the Middle East so far. They fall into the categories of reaction reporting, compilations of leader statements and--in the case of Egypt--in-depth studies based largely on the press.

You've good reason to wonder "why we feel we can apply the same analytical apparatus" to Third World countries that we apply to the communist states. We don't. There is no thought here of a blanket transference of the techniques of communist media analysis to these countries. We're well aware that the media in these areas do not play the same role as media in the communist states and that they differ from country to country. Our approaches must be tailored accordingly. We envisage a selective analytic effort, limited to areas and topics on which media analysis proves to be useful.

You ask why not South Africa or India. Chiefly because we've not had any demands placed on us with respect to either country, and it would take further research to determine whether including them would be worth the effort. We do plan to add a small number of Latin American countries to the list in the future.

The main point is that we have to be prepared to respond to legitimate interests on the part of FBIS' major customers. What we are trying to produce is a set of very basic selection and processing SOP's based on educated guesses as to the kinds of authoritative statements the FBIS research base should contain--for us and for our clientele.

[redacted] comments seem to reflect an assumption that we must be asking for a lot more than we're getting, because simply codifying existing practice doesn't make sense. In fact we think it does. Any set of requirements is a statement of goals influenced by a judgment of what is available and feasible. When it turns out that the goals are largely being met by existing practice, we have assurance that we--FBIS and the BBC--are doing our jobs well. With new editors cycling in and out of the bureaus all the time, codifying a satisfactory status quo helps to insure the consistency and continuity that are essential if the DAILY REPORT is to serve as a reliable base for research. When existing practice falls well short of a goal defined in a set of guidelines, we have to examine the shortfall: If an appreciable amount of the material that is not being processed turns out to be chaff rather than wheat, then the goal needs to be restated in such a way as to exclude the worthless material. If the unprocessed material turns out to be significant, then we need to consider how and where it can best be processed.

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Now as for 'mandatory texting.' The draft should have been clearer in spelling out the degree of leeway for judgment. But I also have the impression the BBC may have been so predisposed against written "requirements" of any kind that they simply skipped over passages that didn't sound mandatory. Freudian skip? For example, [redacted] comment appears to assume that when any of the listed leaders even mentions one of the listed subject categories, we want the entire text of the speech. That was not the intent. The introductory page 1 mentions use of the Cue, FYI, and Editorial Report, and the footnote on page 3 restates the standing FBIS policy on excerpts. The introductory sentence on page 3 should have said in so many words that excerpts or editorial reports are perfectly okay, though I would have thought that was understood. Note also the second paragraph on page 3, which states that the subject categories should be applied "as appropriate to the country and the position of the official." That, it seems to me (if you'll forgive the wildly mixed metaphor), is a caveat through which you could drive a whole platoon of editors and monitors armed with judgment and discretion.

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We are baffled by [redacted] judgment that the guidelines would entail significantly increased processing of North African leader statements from French-language papers. We are not talking about adding sources to those now on coverage. We also don't understand the relevance of John's reference to speeches by "officials below leader level." If there is indeed a lot of unprocessed material in statements by the listed leaders carried in media covered by the PMU, it may fall in Production Group's purview. Prod may be covering it already, or it may turn out to be of marginal interest and be excludable. In any case, there is no intention to impose a processing load that would expand the PMU staff. To help us sort this out, could you provide some chapter and verse on the basis for the PMU's assessment of the impact?

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The responses from the other bureaus are in hand and are attached to this letter. Gulf and Tel Aviv are the only ones to suggest changes: [redacted] proposes some additions, and [redacted] cogently describes the unique kind of quagmire represented by Israeli media. While we have no current plans to analyze Israeli sources, we have frequent occasion to refer to Israeli leaders' statements, and we think the approach suggested in Jim's last paragraph makes good sense.

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What we have, then, is a draft document which with a few changes could serve almost at once as a working tool for those bureaus but which the BBC views with alarm. We think the best course in the circumstances would be to recast it, at least for now, as a statement of interest rather than a set of "requirements." As such, it could serve the other bureaus for all practical purposes as the kind of guidance that was intended from the outset. For London Bureau it could serve as an informational document--in effect a set of provisional processing guidelines based on assumptions whose validity we can jointly explore as resources permit.

The step-at-a-time approach [redacted] suggests seems an entirely reasonable one to apply to coverage where problems are discerned or strongly suspected. We thought it might also be helpful to identify among the countries in BBC's coverage area, where the perceived problems exist, those currently having highest priority in terms of U.S. interest. We would place Saudi Arabia, Libya, Afghanistan, and Iran in that group. The exercise now in train on Saudi coverage is providing some idea of the frequency of authoritative statements, as well as useful information on Saudi media behavior generally and on the overall responsiveness of the level of processing. A similar fact-finding approach might be applied in the future to one or more of the other high-priority countries, or we might want simply to do a trial run in applying the draft guidelines to one of them.

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Let me know your reaction to this game plan. My apologies again for the length of this essay. Peace and best regards,



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Attachments:

As stated

cc: DD/FBIS  
C/Ops